



PATIENT EDUCATION HANDOUTS

Warts and Plantar Warts

Topic Overview

Is this topic for you?

This topic has information about warts on any part of the body except the genitals. For information about warts on the genitals, see the topic [Genital Warts](#).

What are warts, and what causes them?

A wart is a harmless skin growth caused by some types of the virus called the [human papillomavirus \(HPV\)](#). There are more than 100 known types of HPV. HPV infects the top layer of skin, usually entering the body in an area of broken skin. The virus causes the top layer of skin to grow rapidly, forming a wart. Most warts go away on their own within months or years.

Warts can grow anywhere on the body. They are most common among children and young adults.

There are five kinds of warts. They look different and form on different parts of the body.

- [Common warts](#) 📷 grow most often on the hands, but they may be anywhere on the body. They are rough, shaped like a dome, and gray-brown in color.
- [Plantar warts](#) 📷 grow on the soles of the feet. They look like hard, thick patches of skin with dark specks. Plantar warts may cause pain when you walk, and you may feel like you are stepping on a pebble.
- [Flat warts](#) 📷 usually grow on the face, arms, or legs. They are small (usually smaller than the eraser on the end of a pencil), have flat tops, and can be pink, light brown, or light yellow.
- [Filiform warts](#) 📷 usually grow around the mouth, nose, or beard area. They are the same color as your skin and have growths that look like threads sticking out of them.
- [Periungual warts](#) 📷 grow under and around the toenails and fingernails. They look like rough bumps with an uneven surface and border. They can affect nail growth.

How are warts spread?

Warts are easily spread by direct contact with a human papillomavirus. You can infect yourself again by touching the wart and then another part of your body. You can infect another person by sharing towels, razors, or other personal items. After contact with HPV, it can take 2 to 9 months of slow growth beneath the skin before you notice a wart.

It is unlikely that you will get a wart every time you come in contact with HPV. Some people are more likely to get warts than others.

What are the symptoms?

Warts come in a wide range of shapes and sizes. A wart may be a bump with a rough surface, or it may be flat and smooth. Tiny blood vessels grow into the core of the wart to supply it with blood. In both common and plantar warts, these blood vessels may look like dark dots in the wart's center. In most cases, the skin lines and creases over the wart look distorted.

Warts are usually painless. But a wart that grows in a spot where you put pressure, such as on a finger or on the bottom of the foot, can be painful.

How are warts diagnosed?

A doctor usually can tell if a skin growth is a wart just by looking at it. Your doctor may take a sample of the wart and look at it under a microscope (skin [biopsy](#)). This may be done if it is not clear that the growth is a wart. It may also be done if a skin growth is darker than the skin surrounding it, is an irregular patch on the skin, bleeds, or is large and fast-growing.

How are they treated?

Most warts don't need treatment. But if you have warts that are painful or spreading, or if you are bothered by the way they look, your treatment choices include:

- Using a home treatment such as salicylic acid or adhesive tape. You can get these without a prescription.
- Putting a stronger medicine on the wart, or getting a shot of medicine in it.
- Freezing the wart (cryotherapy).
- Removing the wart with surgery (electrosurgery, curettage, laser surgery).

Wart treatment does not always work. Even after a wart shrinks or goes away, warts may come back or spread to other parts of the body. This is because most treatments destroy the wart but do not kill the virus that causes the wart.

Frequently Asked Questions


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Getting treatment:

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